



Joe Biden is sworn in as the 46th President of the United States on the West Front of the U.S. Capitol in Washington, U.S., January 20, 2021 Photograph: Reuters

Greetings!

Read [Psalm 119:105](#)

While watching the presidential inauguration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr. as our 46th president, I was struck by the size of the family Bible that he used. The Bible is a 127-year-old Bible that has been passed down from generation to generation in his family.

This led me to wonder what other Bibles presidents have used in their inaugural ceremonies. The Constitution Center has a nice article dedicated to answering this question [1]. There are many traditions wrapped around the use of the Bible in civic ceremonies and inaugurations of U.S. presidents is no exception. Several presidents used two Bibles, one a personal Bible, the other a historic Bible. However, not all the presidents used Bibles for the oath of office including several of the founding fathers. For some there simply is no record, for others, books other than the Bible were used. [2] The notion of sacred text made me think about the Bibles I use for my own spiritual formation.

I have many Bibles, probably more than 30. Many have been given as gifts both informally or formally like confirmation and my ordinations as Deacon and Elder. A friend stopped by the office once with a new Bible, said she'd been out shopping and saw the Bible and I thought of me. Naturally I laughed, but what an awesome thing. Someone thought of me while shopping and brought a gift. And the gift was the Word of God. We are still great friends today! Each Bible has given me a spiritual depth to my walk with Jesus. Many of the gift Bibles have included wonderful inscriptions - touchstones of my 30 years in ordained ministry.

Over the years I have used various Bibles for multiple purposes. When I was a local church pastor and we were doing Disciple Bible Study, I would order paperback NRSV Bibles

from the American Bible Society. We gave ourselves permission to write in the margins, underline, highlight, pull out pages - whatever we needed to do to delve into the text. At \$5 each, they were a great investment and we really got into the Word!



In the 1990s, I used the Serendipity Bible for retreats and Sunday School studies. Each section of scripture had a wonderful process conversation regarding the text. These conversations were so rich. I received this Bible from the author Lyman Coleman, who was a Christian educator in the 1960s-1990s. Coleman spent his whole life making the Bible more accessible and a richer experience for people in his local congregation. Then he took what he learned and traveled extensively throughout the United States sharing this gift with others.

Besides my Serendipity Bible I use the Message. Like Coleman, Eugene Peterson was a local church pastor. He heard the complaint from his parishioners that they couldn't understand the Bible. For many, the language was just too far off from conversational English. So Peterson embarked on the project himself and translated then paraphrased from original biblical languages. You may remember that the work came out in sections? Peterson published these sections separately from 1993-2002. Most of my preaching Bibles have been NRSV Study Bibles with annotations in them - such a help for finding additional text to support the sermon and to broaden my own understanding.



While I was at Hilliard UMC I was gifted the *Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation*. This Bible is a gas! I use it for almost everything now. First of all it is a fresh translation. It was produced by the Quixote Center. The priests of the Quixote Center began efforts in 1975 with the Priests for Equality to produce a new Bible translation. Together, both

groups are noted for calling the Roman Catholic Church to fully live into the call of the 2nd Vatican Council for justice. These leaders, many trained in liturgical theology and Biblical history, believed that the call for justice included the end of racial and gender discrimination in all forms. They advocated for women in the priesthood and they were denounced and shut down for this advocacy. The Quixote Center continued the work and in 1988, the process to translate a fresh rendering of the Bible in inclusive language was finally underway. In Hebrew scripture both men and women are included in the text. Instead of **God**, the Hebrew word **Yahweh** is used and in the instruction in the preface, we are encouraged to say, "**The Name for God**," as traditional Judaism would expect. In Christian tradition texts, men and women are included. For example, in the Gospel of Matthew the genealogies don't just include the names of the men, they include the mothers of the generations, too.

Bibles are living documents that shape our spiritual lives. I'm sure the Bible has formed your walk with Jesus. So ponder these questions as you think about the special Bibles that have shaped you.

- What special Bible do you have? Do you have more than one?
- How did you receive that Bible?
- In what ways has the Word shaped you? Was it a particular translation, or questions that it asked you?
- Have you ever bought a Bible for someone? If so, why? If not, why?

[1] <https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/how-presidents-use-bibles-at-inaugurations>

[2] Ibid.

Peace,



Rev. Dr. Todd D. Anderson, West Ohio Superintendent
Ohio River Valley District, United Methodist Church

